

# Climate Strategy 2023

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## Forward

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## Executive Summary

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## Introduction

To tackle the Climate and Ecological Emergencies, the strategy to reduce emissions and create a cleaner, greener, more equitable District must evolve. The strategy review, carried out in 2022/23 in partnership with stakeholders and the wider community, has resulted in the Climate Strategy 2023. This document sets out how the Council will use its powers and influence to make Rother District carbon neutral, and reduce the Council’s operational emissions to Net Zero, by 2030.

## Background

Climate change is the defining issue of our time. Evidence from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in the 2023 [AR6 report](#) demonstrates global warming is likely to exceed 1.5°C well before 2050 with the existing policies and laws currently in place. The burning of fossil fuels and deforestation is causing an unprecedented increase in global temperatures.

The impacts of climate change can be seen all around us. Unlike the Covid-19 pandemic which had a devastating, sudden impact, the impact of climate change has been less visible however scientists predict we are nearing the tipping point. We are seeing an increase in flooding, droughts, and extremes in temperature. In 2022 and we saw the warmest year on record with temperatures reaching above 40 degrees and the average annual temperature passing 10 degrees for the first time.

In 2019, in response to the climate crisis, the UK Government passed legislation to achieve Net Zero by 2050. This aligned with the commitments of the Paris Agreement to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees. The Government committed to halting its contribution to global warming and lead the way in clean growth.

Rother District Council shared the Government's goal to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. On 16th September 2019 Rother District Council formally declared a Climate Emergency at Full Council and committed to:

*Pledge to do what is within our powers, to make Rother District carbon neutral by 2030, taking into account both production and consumption emissions.*

In 2020 the Council's response to the Climate Emergency was developed in consultation with local partners and residents. On 21st September 2020, the Environment Strategy 2020 was adopted by the Council. The COVID-19 pandemic delayed the publication of the Action Plan, but significant steps have been taken by the Council to reduce emissions both across the District and operationally. Full details of these actions can be seen on the Council's Climate Emergency [webpage](#).

Climate Emergency declarations and Local Authority Environment Strategies were relatively new in 2019/20. Climate science and public awareness has increased considerably in the relatively short time since. The pandemic has also changed our lives in many ways and the public response demonstrates how quickly behaviour can change when resourced and motivated.

There has also been a growing awareness of the Ecological Emergency we face with devastating biodiversity loss and species decline. The Climate and Ecological Emergencies are distinct but intrinsically linked. Restoring, protecting, and enhancing nature can remove carbon from the atmosphere and store it. Nature-based solutions such as natural flood management are highly effective ways to adapt to the changing climate and create a more sustainable landscape.

This Strategy will be reviewed at intervals and progress against the Climate Action Plan 2023-26 will be reported annually in the Climate Action Report. Action planning for 2026-2030 will be presented in due course taking into consideration progress on the present Climate Action Plan 2023-26 and technological advancements.

Rother's carbon footprint is presented in Appendix A and a summary of the findings has been included in this document. This baseline data identifies key sources of emissions which need to be prioritised for decarbonisation. The evidence base has also been used to select action areas to improve biodiversity, opportunities to lock up carbon through sequestration and generate clean, local energy.

### What is a carbon neutral District?

To achieve carbon neutrality an area, business or individual needs to find a balance between the emissions they emit and the levels of sequestration. Carbon is sequestered, or

absorbed, naturally in trees, wetlands, grasslands, soil and the ocean. Carbon capture and storage technologies can also remove carbon from the atmosphere.

To be a carbon-neutral District, emissions in Rother must be reduced and sequestration, through natural processes, enhanced.

As an organisation, Rother District Council has a target to be Net Zero by 2030. Net Zero is more ambitious compared with carbon neutrality as the focus is on reducing emissions and only offsetting the residual, hard to abate emissions. The Science Based Targets initiative (SBTi) recommends organisations reduce emissions by at least 90% before offsetting to reach Net Zero.

## Rother’s Carbon Footprint

### District-wide emissions

In 2019, the District-wide carbon footprint for Rother was 448.87 kilotonnes CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent (ktCO<sub>2</sub>e). This is to be considered the baseline year, against which reductions are measured, as this is the year the Council made the Climate Emergency Declaration.

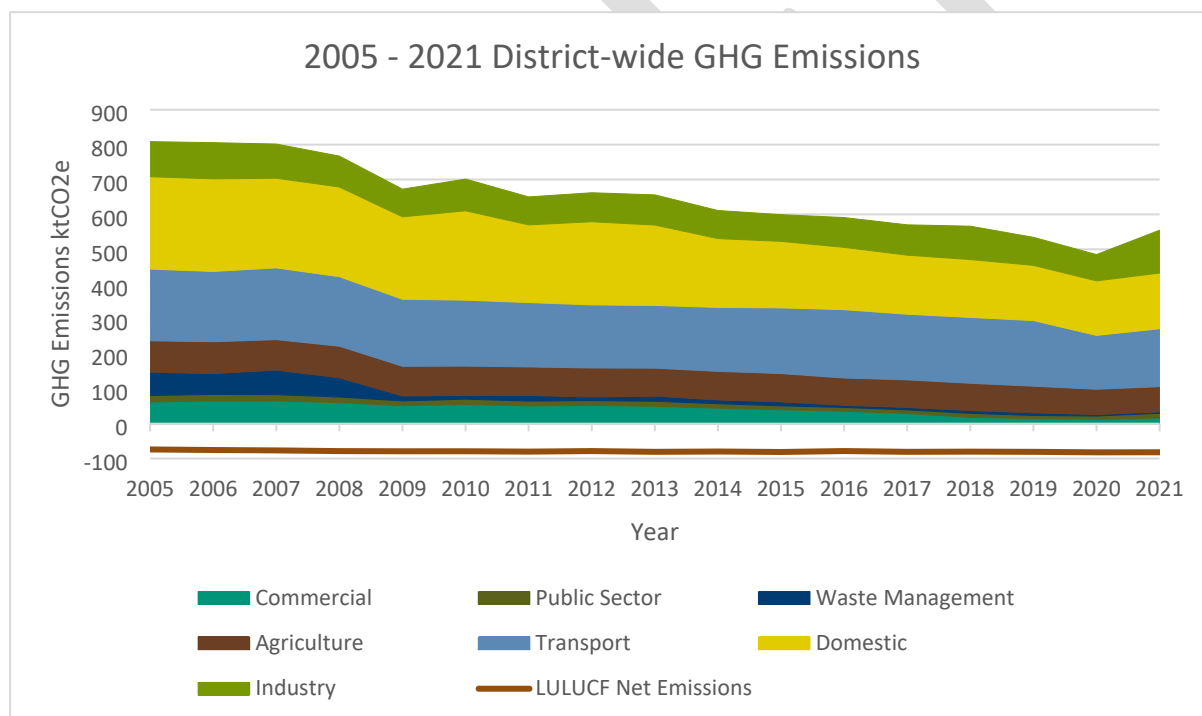


Figure 1: District-wide carbon emissions by sub-sector from 2005 - 2021 for Rother (Source: DESNZ 2023)

Emissions have been steadily decreasing across Rother since 2005. This is mostly due to the decarbonisation of the national grid. The government has set a 2035 target for the national grid to be fossil fuel free.

Each year the government publishes UK local authority and regional estimates of greenhouse gas emissions. The statistics use nationally available data sets going back to 2005 and cover territorial emissions of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>), methane (CH<sub>4</sub>) and nitrous oxide (N<sub>2</sub>O). Figure 1 and Figure 2 show the breakdown of emissions by sector in Rother from 2005 – 2021.

In 2021, Rother had a carbon footprint of 472.6 ktCO<sub>2</sub>e, up 15% on 2020 and up 4% on 2019. Emissions have risen between 2020 and 2021 across all parts of the UK and Rother is no exception. This is mainly due to an increase in industrial emissions and post-COVID transport emissions which has been seen across the county and nationally. Transport emissions have however remained below pre-COVID levels.

Industrial emissions have seen a particular increase across the country with 85% of local authorities experiencing an increase. This increase is largely from industrial gas usage.

Transport, domestic, and industrial emissions are responsible for 90% of Rother's emissions. Tackling the emissions from where we live, work, and how we travel will be the focus of this Climate Strategy. The full report for 2021 District-wide emissions is presented in Appendix A.

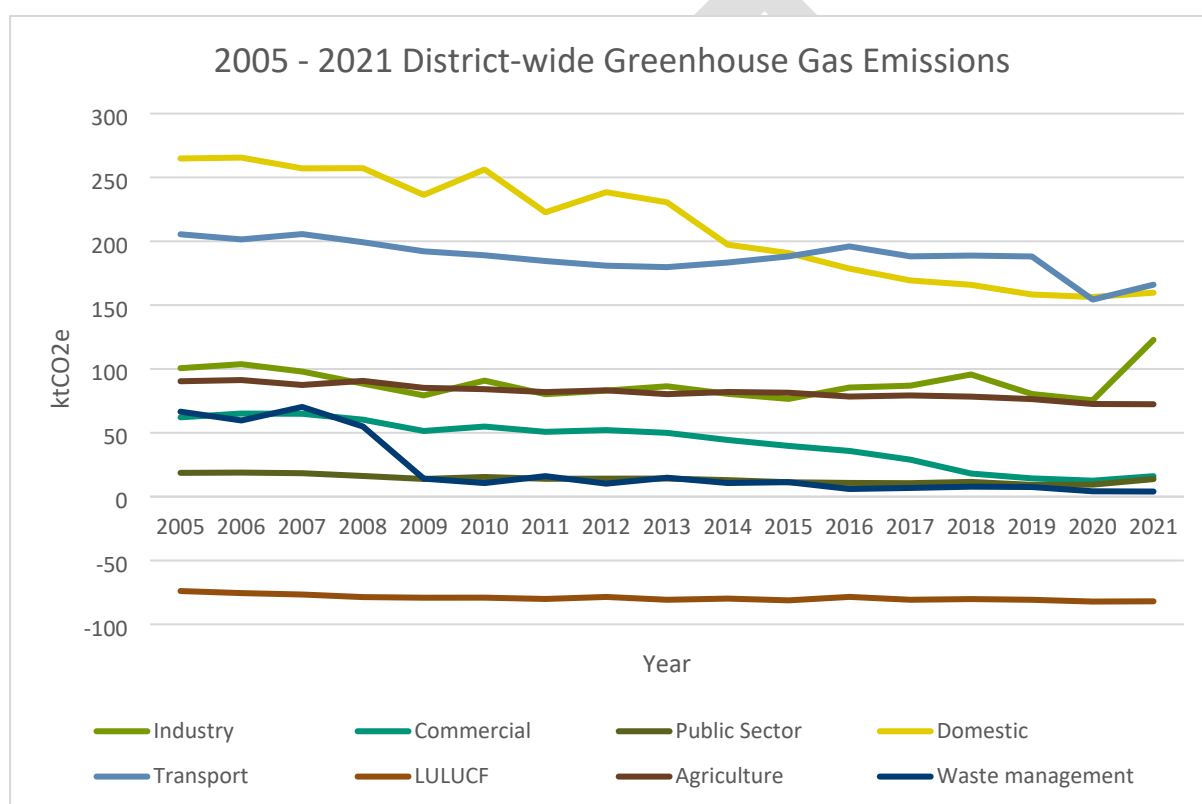


Figure 2: Rother's GHG emissions by sub-sector

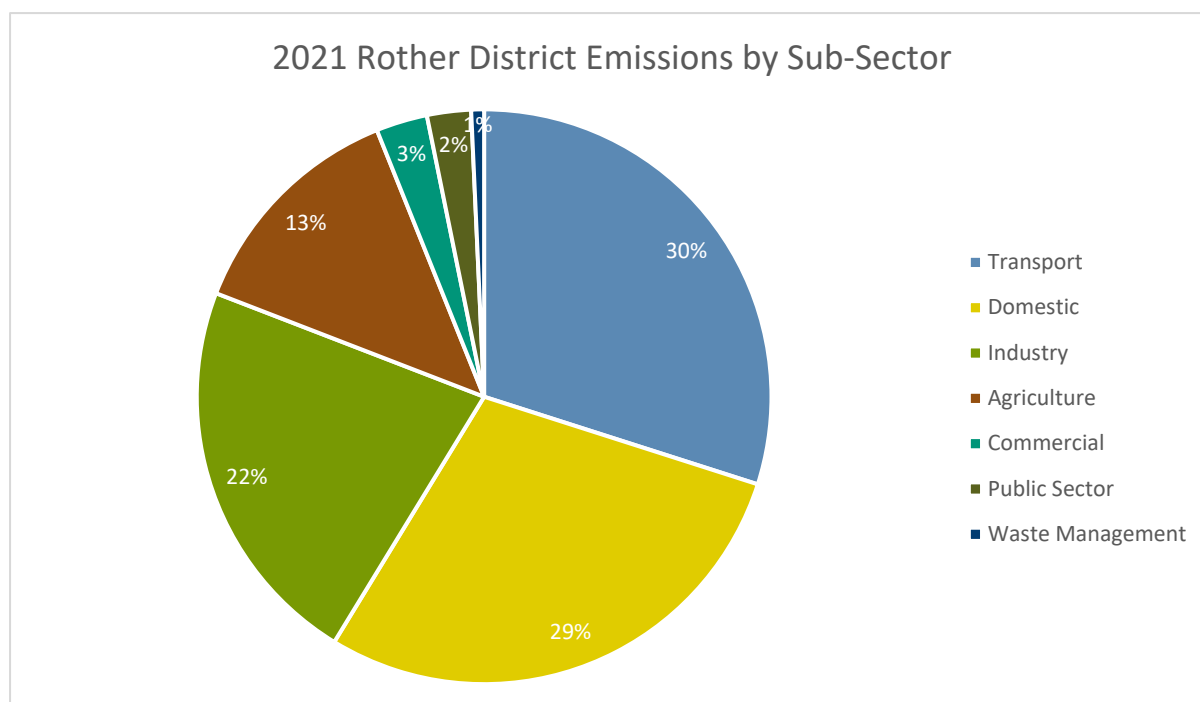


Figure 3: Rother District's 2021 Emissions shown by sub-sector

### Rother District Council operational emissions

Rother District Council has published Scope 1 and 2 emissions for 2019/20, 2020/21 and 2021/22. Scope 3 emissions from the waste contract, leisure centres, and indirect operational activities such as business mileage were included for the first time in the 22/23 reporting. The full 2022/23 annual report can be seen in Appendix B. The Council set its baseline accounting year as 2019/20. This aligns with the year the Council made the Climate Emergency Declaration and gives a pre-covid figure. Emissions dropped significantly in 2020 due to multiple lockdowns and a 2020/21 baseline would not be a true reflection of emissions without lockdowns.

Scope 1 – emissions released as a direct result of an activity such as fuel for heating boilers and the fuel burned in council-owned fleet vehicles.

Scope 2 – emissions released as an indirect consumption of energy. For a local authority, this is purchased grid electricity used in its operations.

Scope 3 – all other indirect emissions that occur from activities upstream or downstream of an organisation.

Scope 3 emission reporting is relatively new and methodologies for accurate calculations are still emerging. From 22/23, the Council reports on the Scope 3 emissions it can accurately obtain. This includes emissions from the waste fleet, leisure services, staff business mileage, and water consumption in council-operated buildings. Staff commuting will be included in Scope 3 emissions, but it should be noted these emissions will be estimates. Rother District Council supports remote working. Staff are not required to formally record how often they travel to work and the method of transport. An employee commuting survey was carried out in spring 2023, the results of which have been used to calculate baseline emissions.

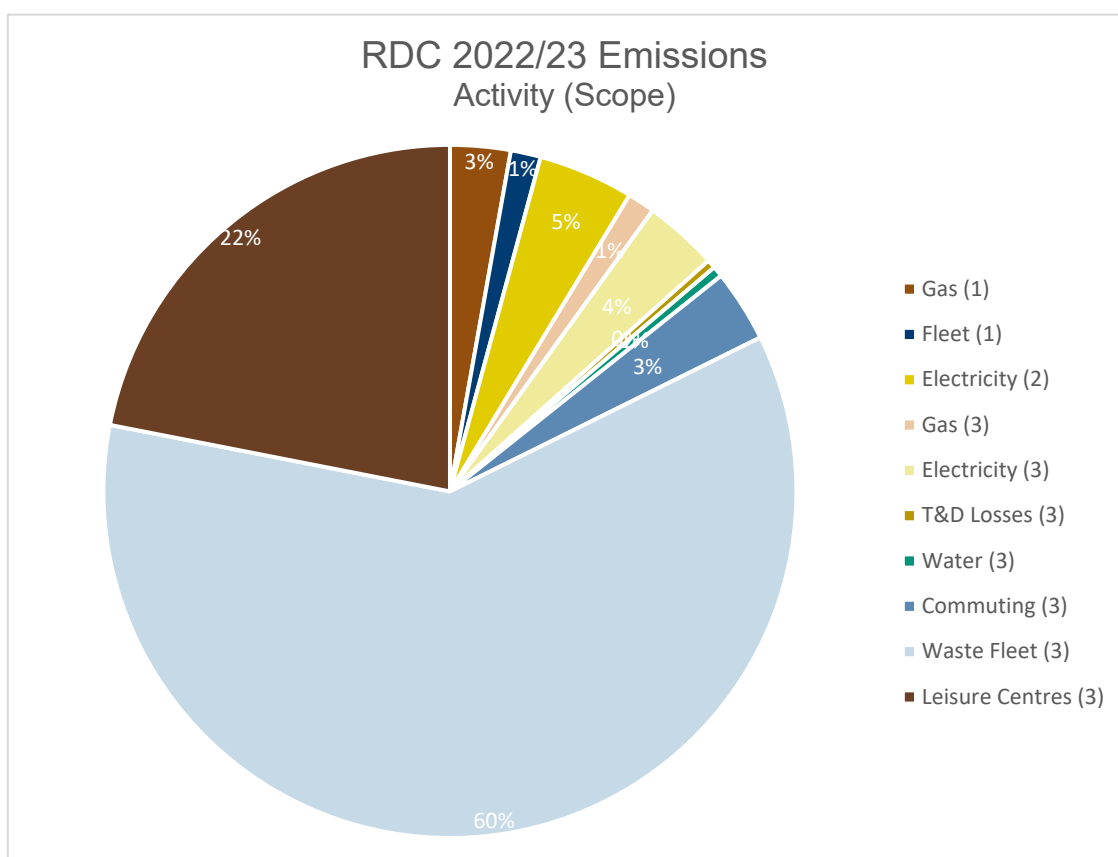
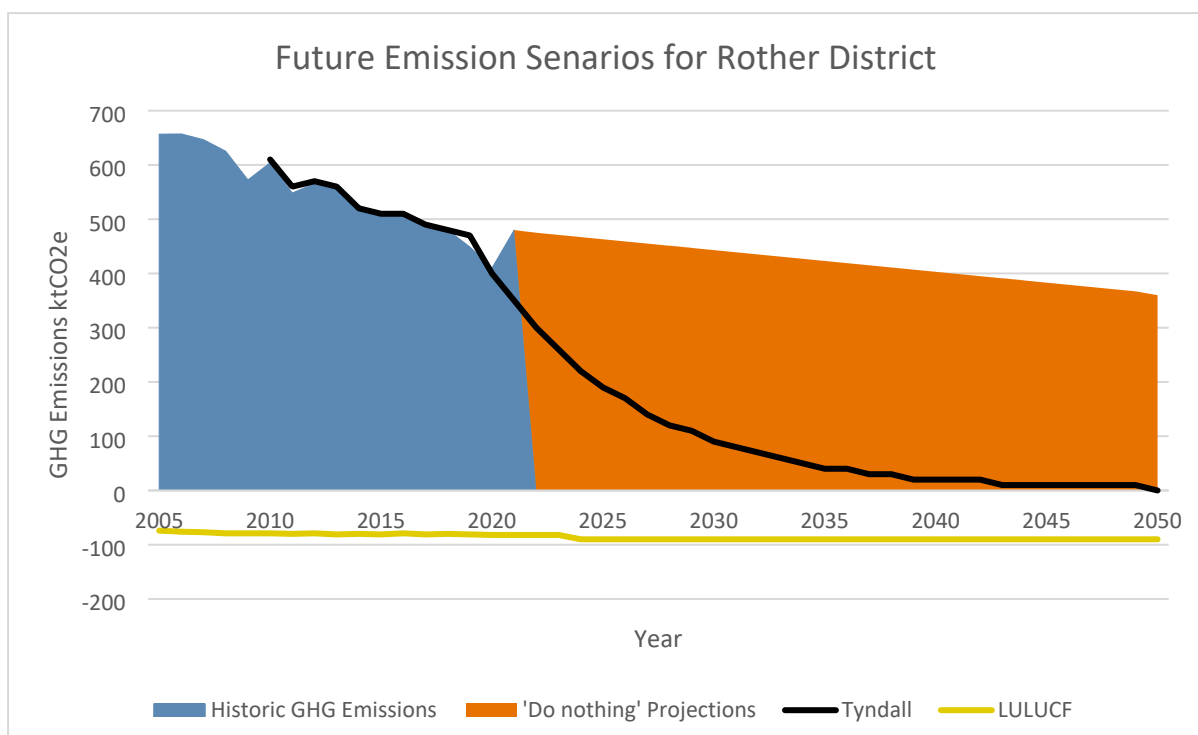


Figure 4 Rother District Council's 22/23 Emissions by Activity (Scope)

Scope 3 emissions account for over 90% of the Council's carbon footprint in 22/23. The Council does not have direct control over these emissions but can use its influence through policy and procurement to reduce these emissions. Most Scope 3 emissions are also District-wide emissions.

The Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research has calculated the rate of emission reduction required by Local Authority areas to do their fair share in line with the commitments of the Paris Agreement. The report presents a carbon budget for the District divided into five-year periods and recommends that District-wide emissions should be reduced by 13.8% annually to stay within the carbon budget.



*Figure 5 Future Emission Trajectories for Rother*

To reduce emissions to Net Zero, Rother District Council's operational emissions should be reduced by 50% annually. Organisational Scope 1 and 2 emissions are on track (Figure 6) but Scope 3 emissions are not currently (Figure 7). It should be noted that decarbonising Scope 3 emissions will happen in large steps and as such the decarbonisation trajectory is a long-term guide. Switching the refuse fleet from diesel to a low-carbon alternative will result in a reduction of almost 60% in Scope 3 emissions at 22/23 levels.



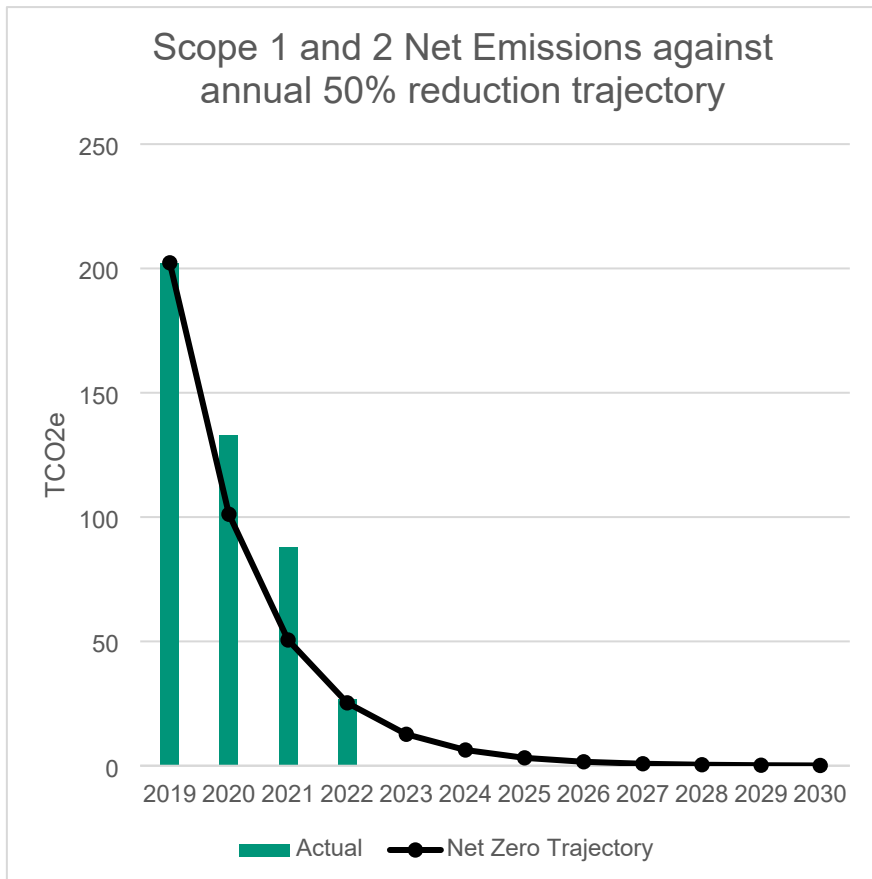


Figure 6 Organisational Scope 1&2 emissions against Net Zero trajectory

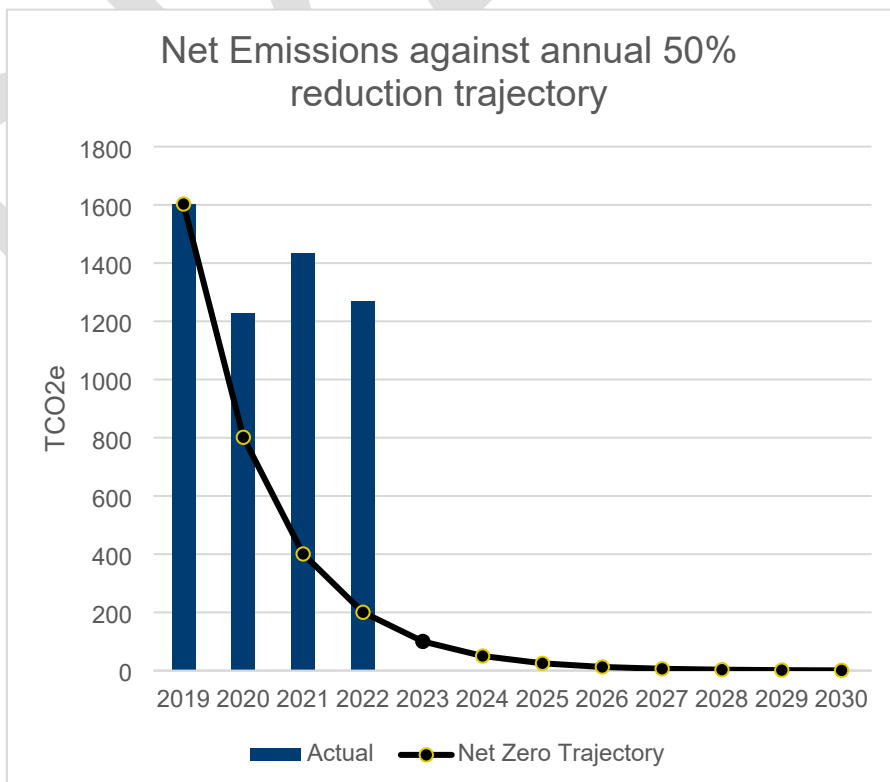


Figure 7 Organisational Scope 1,2 &3 emissions against Net Zero trajectory

### Climate Resilient Communities

The Council's vision of climate resilience stems from the need to mitigate and adapt to climate change. Climate-resilient communities are no longer contributing to global warming, and they are prepared for the changes yet to come from decades of past greenhouse gas emissions.

We each have a role to play and through mitigation, we will reduce the future impacts of climate change. By reducing the release of greenhouse gases into the earth's atmosphere, we can limit future global warming. Through climate adaptation, we can be prepared for the effects of climate change which are yet to come.

Climate-resilient communities are engaged and understand the power they have collectively and as individuals to bring about change. Research carried out by the IPCC in 2023 suggests 'society could deliver 40 – 70% of low carbon transformation through demand reduction and behavioural change'. In Rother, we are fortunate to have many experienced individuals and community groups already working towards building climate-resilient communities. The Council's Climate Strategy looks to build upon these foundations and drive further action.

### The Role of Local Authorities

Local Authorities play a crucial role in achieving the UK's Net Zero greenhouse gas emissions target. Through policies and partnerships, local authorities have a strong influence on more than a third of emissions in the local area. Local authorities can also lead by example, decarbonising public buildings and reducing emissions across the area.

There are significant challenges ahead and the Skidmore review highlights the need for a 'step change in the government's approach'. There is, however, no time to delay and whilst the route to Net Zero will require all of us to take personal responsibility, local authorities have a particularly important role to play.

With only seven years left until 2030, the date by which the Council aims to achieve Net Zero as an organisation and be a carbon-neutral District, the Council recognises the scale of the challenge. However, the pandemic response demonstrates how communities can dramatically change their behaviour when supported by the right policies.

### UK Policy Context

Since the adoption of the Environment Strategy (2020), there have been several key policy and legislative changes that support the Council's climate ambitions. These are presented below and should be included in addition to the policy context presented in the Environment Strategy (2020).

In December 2020 the Committee on Climate Change (CCC) published the [Sixth Carbon Budget](#) which made recommendations to help the UK reach Net Zero emissions by 2050. One of the actions was to deliver a 78% reduction in emissions from 1990 to 2035.

The [Environment Act 2021](#) is the UK's framework for environmental protection. The Act offers new powers to set binding targets for air quality, water, biodiversity, and waste

reduction. The Act sets out the legal framework for significant reforms to local authority waste and recycling services as well as new statutory duties on nature recovery.

At COP26 the [Glasgow Climate Pact](#) was adopted. This package of decisions was agreed upon by all countries who signed the Paris Agreement and aims to turn the 2020s into a decade of climate action and support.

In 2021 the Government published the [Net Zero Strategy: Build Back Greener](#). This is a 10-point plan for a green economic recovery from the impact of COVID-19. The plan includes the decarbonisation pathway to Net Zero by 2050, policies and proposals to reduce emissions in each sector, and cross-cutting action to support the transition.

[Nature Positive 2030](#) was published by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee in 2021. The report highlights the critical role of nature recovery and the critical role the UK's nature conservation bodies can make in the recovery of the UK's nature.

The Climate Change Committee's [Independent Assessment of UK Climate Risk](#) provides advice to the Government for the UK's third Climate Change Risk Assessment (CCRA3). The UK Government is required to publish a CCRA every five years under the 2008 Climate Change Act.

In 2022 the Government published the [UK Climate Change Risk Assessment](#) which outlines the key climate change risks and opportunities the UK faces.

The Climate Change Committee's [2022 Progress Report to Parliament](#) is a statutory report providing an overview of the UK Government's progress to date in reducing emissions. This report noted the risks to meeting the UK's Net Zero target and the national policy changes needed to mitigate those risks.

In January 2023, Rt Hon Chris Skidmore MP published [Mission Zero: Independent Review of Net Zero](#) – The former Energy Minister led an independent review of the government's approach to delivering its Net Zero target. The review presented opportunities and benefits to individuals and the economy alongside recommendations to deliver on this target.

The [Environmental Improvement Plan 2023](#) was also published in January 2023. This builds on the Government's 25 Year Environmental Plan from 2018 and sets out how the Government will work with landowners, communities, and businesses to improve the environment in England.

The Government published the third [National Adaptation Programme](#) (NAP3) in July 2023. The report presents the Government's approach to protecting society from the impacts of climate change. Key elements of the programme include protecting the natural environment, supporting businesses in adapting to climate change, adapting infrastructure, protecting buildings and their surroundings, protecting public health and communities, and mitigating international impacts on the UK.

### Opportunities and Challenges for Rother

Building climate-resilient communities is a challenge and Rother is no exception. In the past three years, we have experienced a global pandemic, an energy crisis, an ongoing housing crisis, and a cost-of-living crisis all whilst coping with the increasing impacts of climate change.

As with the intertwined Climate and Ecological Emergencies, the impacts of climate change will continue to exacerbate the challenges society faces. As resources become scarcer and prices rise, it will be those who are less financially able to cope who will feel the effects the hardest. The Council is committed to ensuring an equitable transition to a low-carbon future and will ensure all future projects are assessed in terms of their social and climatic impact.

Alongside climate risks are the opportunities a transition to a low-carbon society will provide. Often referred to as co-benefits, these include enhanced health and wellbeing, economic and ecological benefits as well as greater energy security.

In 2022, the government published the latest CCRA3 which considered 61 climate risks and opportunities for the UK. All 61 risks and opportunities are applicable to Rother. The demography and character of the District make temperature increase, rising sea levels, increased flooding, energy security, and ecological collapse particularly relevant.

#### Health and wellbeing

Hotter summers are a greater risk to health for the elderly and the very young. The 2021 census results show almost a third of Rother residents are age 65+ (32.3%), ranking second highest in the country. Rother also has the second highest proportion of over 85s in the country. By comparison, 20.7% of the Hastings population is aged 65+. East Sussex County Council estimates the population of Rother to increase by approximately 12.5% by 2035. The number of households aged 65+ is anticipated to increase by up to 37%. This means more households will be dependent on the working-age population.

An increasingly dependent population will have a knock-on effect on climate resilience as older people can be more adversely affected by climate change. The elderly are more likely to suffer from extremes in temperatures and an increase in single occupancy homes with low income are less likely to be able to afford to make the necessary changes to their homes.

The health and wellbeing co-benefits associated with climate action are numerous and well-documented. Changes to methods of transport will improve air quality, physical, and mental health. Better insulated and ventilated homes are also known to improve health and wellbeing.

#### Economy and Energy Security

Climate change can have a financial impact on residents, businesses, and the Council. Risks including more intense, extreme weather events such as river and coastal flooding, higher temperatures, drought, or intense rainfall, are already causing disruptions. In 2022, the District saw businesses and school closures due to disruptions to the water supply following severe storms. Businesses were affected by the extreme heat and residents were put under

hosepipe bans to deal with water shortages. Flooding also adversely affects parts of the District with local businesses and residents feeling the impact.

The economic impacts of climate change could lead to further inequality as those most vulnerable are often the least able to make changes to their homes, enjoy access to nature, and enjoy a good quality of life. In 2022, Friends of the Earth identified 20 energy crisis hotspots in Rother. These communities are those most affected by soaring energy prices with high energy usage and lower than average household income.

Adapting to changes in the climate can build resilience, provide opportunities, and support long-term growth. The National Adaptation Program (NAP3) identifies supporting businesses to adapt to climate change as one of the top priorities and businesses of all sizes are realising the benefits of moving to a low-carbon economy.

The energy crisis has shown how vulnerable we are as a society to international energy pricing and supply. Huge increases in energy bills saw families fall into fuel poverty, businesses forced to close, and slowed economic growth. Locally produced renewable energy is an opportunity to reduce bills and build energy security across the District.

Other economic opportunities relating to the low-carbon transition include new green jobs in Rother. It is estimated over 700 new jobs will be required to meet renewable energy and decarbonisation demand in [Rother](#) by 2030. By 2050 this figure is estimated to rise to over 1,100 jobs.

### Flooding

There have been many recorded flood incidents across Rother in the last 10 years and increased flooding from rivers and surface water, as well as increased coastal flooding, are among the climate-related risks identified in the UK Climate Change Risk Assessment.

There are fluvial, tidal, fluvial/tidal, and coastal flood defences located along most of the coastline and main watercourses in the District. East Sussex County Council, as the Lead Local Flood Authority, sets conditions to ensure surface water management and the use of Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) is included in development proposals.

The Council enforces flooding-related policies to mitigate flooding. The policies are informed by the [Strategic Flood Risk Assessment 2021](#) which relates to both the current risk of flooding from rivers and surface water and where available the potential effects of future climate change.

### Our coastal community

Rother is a coastal District with half the population living in Bexhill-on-Sea. All future projections carried out by the Met Office in the [UK Climate Projections](#) (UKCP18) report (2023) show some degree of sea level rise and, as the Coastal Protection Authority, the Council is responsible for managing the District's coastline. The Environment Agency is the body responsible for carrying out works to prevent flooding of land that lies lower than the shoreline, which includes parts of the District. There is a Shoreline Management Plan (SMP) for the area which sets out the strategy for managing the coastline. The SMP policy for the coastline which includes Rother is to Hold the Line in all areas except that of:

- a) Cliffe End to Fairlight Cove and Fairlight Cove West where there is a no intervention policy
- b) Fairlight Cove East and Central where there is a managed realignment policy

The discharging of sewage into the sea has been a problem nationally for many years and came under increasing public scrutiny in 2022. The health of our coast is not only important for nature and biodiversity, but it also plays an integral part in the local economy. The local economy is reliant on tourism, a sector which was hit particularly hard by the Covid response, and which is only just emerging. A decline in tourism due to a decrease in bathing water quality would be detrimental to a recovering sector.

### Ecology

The Ecological Emergency is closely linked to the Climate Emergency. Climate change is one of the top causes of habitat loss and habitat loss is further driving climate change. Nature, when given the space to do so, plays a key role in mitigating and adapting to climate change. Our natural environment can lock up carbon, store water, provide cooling shelter and more.

Much of the District falls under environmental protection with 82% of the District covered by the High Weald AONB and a further 7% covered by other protected status including SSSI and European Protected Designations. The High Weald AONB Management Plan is a statutory guide for conserving the nationally important landscape and provides a framework for addressing the major issues faced including food and energy security, housing provision, biodiversity and climate change resilience, and the transition to the low carbon economy. The Council has formally adopted the High Weald AONB Management Plan and continues to collaborate with the High Weald AONB.

The High Weald AONB has some of the darkest skies in the Southeast but light pollution is a growing issue. Light pollution negatively impacts wildlife and affects people's health and wellbeing. Dark Skies policies will be integrated into the next High Weald AONB Management Plan and the Council's Local Plan.

Along the coast, the District is covered by a Marine Conservation Zone (MCZ), Beachy Head East, and a Special Protected Area (SPA) with marine components which extends from Bexhill along the coast past Dungeness. The ecological status of the coastline from Beachy Head to Dungeness was classified as 'Moderate' in 2019.

The District includes two river catchments, the Rother and the Cuckmere. These rivers are fed by tributary rivers and streams across the area. Research carried out by The Rivers Trust in 2019 highlighted the condition of all rivers in the UK. Only two streams and one tributary in the District were categorised as 'good' with the remainder categorised as 'moderate', 'poor' or in 'bad' condition. Factors contributing to these results include sewage, pollution, chemical pollution, climate change, habitat loss, drought and water scarcity, and flooding.

Trees naturally capture and store carbon dioxide, making them an incredibly important tool in the fight against climate change. The right trees in the right places can help us to mitigate climate change by sequestering carbon, but they can also help us to adapt to the changing climate. Trees help to reduce flood risk, provide shade and UV protection, trees prevent soil

erosion, and act as windbreaks and sound barriers. Access to trees and green spaces benefits health and wellbeing and trees provide habitats for nature.

In 2021 the Council published the Urban Tree Forest 1066 report on the structure and composition of its urban forest in Bexhill. The Council subsequently commissioned Treeconomics to produce a Tree Planting Strategy for Bexhill. The aim of the Tree Planting Strategy is to increase tree cover in the urban area and ensure equitable access to all in Bexhill.

## Transport

Emissions from transport equate to a third of Rother's carbon footprint. This is not unusual for a rural District and the reduction of these emissions is a key priority for Rother. The District does not have any motorways, but most transport emissions come from A roads. A low-carbon Rother will require improved infrastructure for walking and wheeling, better public transport, and more electric vehicle (EV) charging points to support residents and encourage behavioural change. The number of EVs registered in Rother in 2022 was more than double the number registered in 2020 (Figure 8).

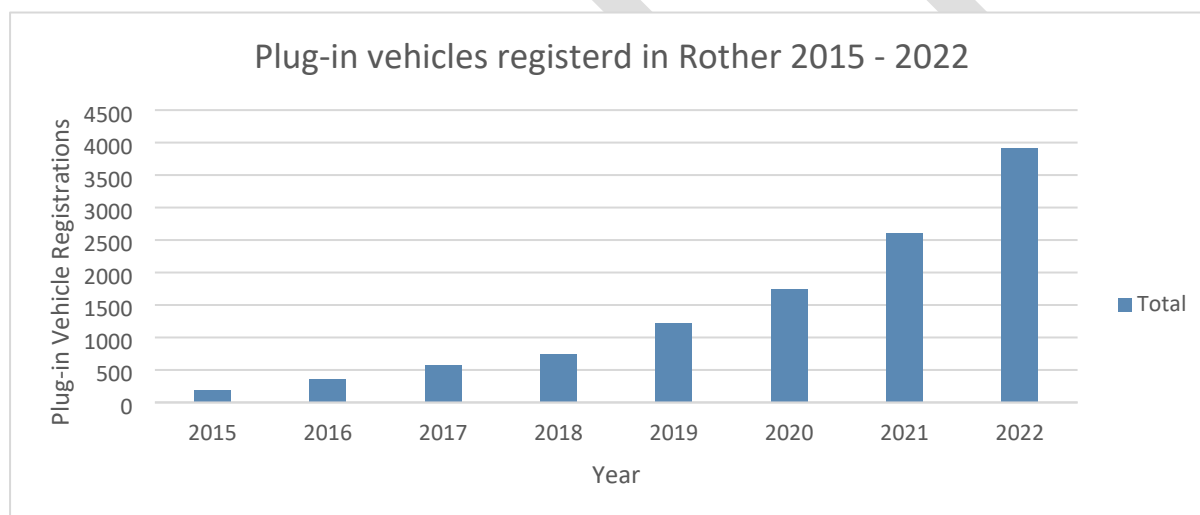


Figure 8 Plug-in vehicles registered in Rother (Source: DVLA)

The government has committed to reducing transport emissions to Net Zero by 2050. In response to this commitment, the government has published several key documents including [Decarbonising Transport: A better, greener Britain](#); [Transitioning to zero emission cars and vans: 2035 delivery plan](#); the [UK electric vehicle infrastructure strategy](#).

East Sussex County Council is the Local Transport Authority (LTA), responsible for the Local Transport Plan (LTP). The LTP is integral to the decarbonisation of transport in Rother as it establishes the transport policies and priorities for the County. Net Zero carbon is a key priority of the developing LTP4 which will run from 2023 – 2050.

## Air Quality

The air quality in Rother is generally good. When there is an exceedance or likely exceedance of an air quality objective, local authorities are required to declare an Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) and establish an Air Quality Action Plan (AQAP). There

are no AQMAs within the District and no formal AQAPs. Full details about the Council's air quality monitoring can be found in the annual [Rother Air Quality Reports](#).

The Council continues to focus on improving air quality across the District and the transition to a low-carbon society will accelerate this work. Cleaner air is a well-recognised co-benefit of decarbonising transport. Air quality in homes will also be improved through retrofitting and switching to low-carbon heating.

### Rother Climate Action

We are fortunate in Rother to have many community groups and individuals who have been taking climate action for decades. This Strategy recognises the opportunity to build upon this local action and engage all residents, businesses, and organisations. The impacts of climate change are being felt by everyone and we together we can have a greater impact.

Established groups such as Rother Environmental Group, Bexhill Environmental Group and Energise Sussex Coast have long been raising awareness and taking action. More recently we have seen increased interest from Parish and Town Councils, the forming of new environmental groups and new 'Wild About' groups appearing across the District.

### Local Offsetting

To meet the Net Zero ambitions of the Council, it is likely offsetting will be required for residual emissions. When considering offsetting it is important to consider the mitigation hierarchy of calculate, avoid, reduce, and finally offset. Without the hierarchy, offsetting can be seen as a license to emit with organisations relying on carbon credits instead of decarbonising.

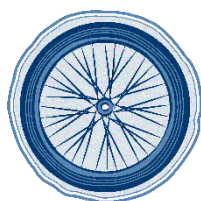
As such, the Council's offsetting policy will be developed in the 2026-30 Climate Action Plan once organisational emissions have been reduced. The policy will prioritise local, nature-based solutions for the benefit of residents and the environment.

### Action Areas

The emissions data, along with the Rother-specific challenges and opportunities discussed above has identified five action areas for the refreshed Climate Strategy. Emissions from buildings, transport, and resource consumption need to be drastically reduced whilst biodiversity enhancements and clean energy generation provide opportunities for nature recovery, carbon sequestration and avoiding emissions. Each action area contains Rother-specific opportunities and challenges.



BUILDINGS AND  
ENERGY  
EFFICIENCY



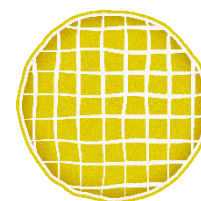
TRANSPORT



RESOURCE  
CONSUMPTION  
AND WASTE



BIODIVERSITY  
AND LAND USE



ENERGY  
GENERATION



## Guiding Principles

The Climate Strategy is ambitious, and the Council has developed the following Guiding Principles to direct the delivery. The Guiding Principles ensure the Council is using its position and influence to lead by example, work in partnership and ensure no one is left behind. The Council recognises the scale of the challenge and the role it plays in encouraging behavioural change across the District.

The impacts of climate change are not felt equally across society and the Council recognises it is often those who have contributed the least who are less able to afford the changes required. The [carbon footprint](#) of parishes varies across the District with more affluent areas responsible for greater emissions. Those least able to afford energy efficiency measures to their homes are often those most in need.

Act now	Work in partnership	Continuously improve	Communicate impact	Be Fair
The Council recognises the urgency and will take action commensurate to the challenge.	The Council recognises its own limitations and the scale of the challenge. The Council will continue to work in partnership to achieve its goals.	The Council will measure, review and update the Climate Strategy and Climate Action Plan regularly to ensure it remains relevant and effective.	The Council will communicate its impact and climate action to encourage others.	The Council will ensure the transition is fair. This means ensuring the benefits of climate action are accessible to all and no one is excluded.

## Funding Rother Climate Action

Funding local authority climate action is a challenge. The Skidmore review and UK100's [Powers in Place](#) report alongside many others have highlighted the problems with the current funding mechanisms. Climate action is not a statutory requirement and funding thus far has been on a competition basis which favours those authorities who are more advanced with their Net Zero journey.

Like many local authorities, Rother District Council is under financial pressure to deliver with increasing demand for services and rising inflation. The Council has an Environment Strategy budget to coordinate and deliver operational and District-wide emission reduction, but it will need to secure alternative funding to deliver on the ambitious 2030 target.

The Council has introduced the Climate Emergency Bonus Fund, ringfencing 20% of the Strategic Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) for eligible projects that have distinct environmental benefits. Community groups and charitable organisations are able to apply to the Rother Reduce, Re-use, Recycle Grants scheme to fund projects which reduce waste in the District.

Government grants, when they become available, are also sought by the Council to deliver climate action. Shared purchase schemes, private finance, and community crowd-funding initiatives will also be required to fund delivery.

## Our Climate Strategy

### Vision

By 2030, Rother will be a carbon-neutral District where climate-resilient communities are well-equipped to deal with the challenges of climate change and are no longer contributing to global warming.

### Aim

The aim of this strategy is to enable, encourage, and accelerate the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions across the District.

### Objectives

1. The built environment will be low carbon and climate resilient.
2. The need to travel will be reduced, those that do will be on foot, bike, public transport, or in a low/zero carbon vehicle.
3. The District will produce less waste and support a thriving circular economy.
4. Nature will be in recovery across the District.
5. Clean, renewable energy will be produced locally.

Vision	A carbon neutral District where climate-resilient communities are well equipped to deal with the changing climate and are no longer contributing to global warming				
Overall Impact Measure	Greenhouse Gas Emissions align with sequestration across the District and organisational emissions are reduced to 10% of 2019/20 baseline. Nature is in recovery across the District				
Action Area	Buildings and Energy Efficiency	Transport	Resource Consumption and Waste	Biodiversity and Land Use	Energy Generation
Objectives	1. Built environment will be low carbon and climate resilient	2. Need to travel will be reduced, those that do will be on foot, bike, public transport or EV	3. The District will produce less waste and support a thriving circular economy	4. Nature will be in recovery across the District	5. Clean, renewable energy will be produced locally

## Buildings and Energy Efficiency

### The Challenge

Most buildings already in place will still be here in 2050 and almost all of them will require some degree of retrofitting to be carbon neutral. There are over 42,000 homes in Rother and the way we heat and power our homes accounts for 32% of emissions in 2021. Added to this are commercial, industrial, public sector and agricultural buildings. Decarbonising the built environment is an enormous challenge.

Rother has a highly valued historic environment with over 2,000 listed buildings and many non-designated historic buildings such as farmsteads. Listed buildings can present more challenges for decarbonisation, but guidance and case studies are available from Historic England.

The District has a much higher proportion of owner occupancy and much lower proportion of social housing compared to the regional, county and national average. The 2021 census, in Rother District, shows 72.7% owner occupied - including mortgages, 10.2% social rented and 17.1% private rented including shared ownership. The tenure composition for the District will influence what funding mechanisms are available to support decarbonisation.

Over two-thirds of domestic properties in Rother have a gas central heating system with the remainder described as off-gas. The remaining 30% is broken down into properties with two or more fuel types, not including renewables (10%), electric heating, either storage heaters, heat pumps, underfloor heating, or electric boilers (10%), and almost 8% are fuelled by oil. Decarbonising off-gas properties is a priority as oil, LPG and gas are both high emitters of greenhouse gasses and they are expensive to run. Residents and businesses fuelled by these sources are more susceptible to volatile energy prices and the buildings are often less energy efficient due to their age.

The population of Rother is predicted to increase by 12.5% in the period between 2020 and 2035. A key challenge to becoming a carbon neutral District will be managing this growth through the planning system. New housing and commercial buildings will need to be carbon neutral and climate resilient. With the projected climate changes, buildings will need to be designed to prevent overheating and increased flood risk.

To meet the demands of decarbonising the built environment, we need to address the green skills gap. The workforce in Rother is not yet equipped to deal with the scale of the decarbonisation required. This is a nationwide challenge, and the government is being urged to develop a skills strategy.

The Council will focus on reducing emissions from existing buildings through retrofitting following the energy hierarchy, sometimes known as the 'fabric-first' approach. This entails reducing the demand for energy and increasing energy efficiency before considering a switch to a decarbonised form of heating.

### Our Approach

#### Reducing District Emissions

We will ensure new domestic and non-domestic buildings are climate-resilient and policies in the emerging Local Plan positively plan for climate mitigation and adaptation.

The government regularly awards funding for decarbonisation projects which target low-income households and the public sector estate. Where applicable, the Council will bid for this funding and deliver projects across the District.

In 2021, The Climate Emergency Bonus Fund was introduced, setting aside a percentage of the Community Infrastructure Levy for eligible projects that have distinct environmental

benefits. To date this fund has been used to improve the energy efficiency of community buildings across the District and improve the environmental credentials of other community assets. We will continue to use this fund to encourage further decarbonisation of community infrastructure.

### Reducing Council Emissions

The Council will continue to retrofit operational buildings to improve energy efficiency and where suitable, solar PV will be installed. Once the energy performance of the buildings has been improved, and at the end of existing plant life, gas boilers will be replaced for low carbon heating alternatives.

Responsibility for energy efficiency measures in leased buildings lies with the tenant however the Council will work with businesses to raise awareness and promote funding opportunities for businesses in Rother looking to take action.

A retrofit program will support local jobs and businesses addressing the current skills gap across the sector.

<b>Objective 1. The built environment will be low carbon and climate resilient.</b>	
<b>Output 1. Mass retrofit of existing buildings</b>	<b>Output 2. Ensure all new buildings are carbon neutral or carbon negative</b>

## Transport

### The Challenge

Transport has been the largest-emitting sector in the UK since 2015, accounting for 26% of total UK emissions in 2021. In Rother, transport was responsible for 166 ktCO<sub>2</sub>, 30% of all emissions in 2021. As a council with a small fleet, 19.05 tCO<sub>2</sub>e were emitted as Scope 1 emissions in 22/23 and an estimated 45.8 tCO<sub>2</sub>e commuter mileage in 22/23 and 41.04 tCO<sub>2</sub>e business mileage in 21/22. Business mileage data for 22/23 was not available at time of writing.

Rother is a rural District, with 50% of the population living in the main urban area of Bexhill. 84% of households in Rother have access to one or more vehicle with 12.7% of household with three or more vehicles and 16% with no vehicles. The coastal town is linked east-west to Hastings and Eastbourne via the A259 and to the north via the A21. By rail the East Coastway route provides links to Brighton and Kent and the Hastings line links to London. Bus services in Rother are provided by Stagecoach and a number of community bus partnerships that receive funding from East Sussex County Council (ESCC). ESCC recently received £41.4m to implement the [Bus Service Improvement Plan](#).

ESCC is the Local Transport Authority (LTA) responsible for developing the Local Transport Plans (LTP). [LTP4](#) is currently in production and will run from 2023 – 2050. LTP4 sets out how the County Council plan to improve transport across the county with Net Zero carbon, health, wellbeing, and social inclusion, and sustainable economic growth among the top priorities. Rother District Council is a Stakeholder in the LTP4 and officers actively engage in workshops to ensure the interests of Rother residents are best met.

Although Rother District Council is not the LTA, the Council can use its influence to reduce transport emissions and support the transition to low-zero carbon (LZC) transport across the district.

### Our Approach

#### Reducing District Emissions

Spatial policies in the Local Plan will ensure new domestic and non-domestic development is sustainably located to limit new transport emissions and reduce existing emissions. Policies will also be introduced to ensure active travel routes are available and accessible.

The Council will install EV charging points in Rother District Council owned carparks where grid capacity allows. The Council will also provide charging facilities and incentivise EV uptake for staff.

Through grants and partnership working with businesses and community groups, the Council can encourage others to install EV chargers and promote active travel.

#### Reducing Council Emissions

The Council leases a small fleet. These vehicles are predominately maintenance vehicles with one 4X4 for the Coastal Team and one Environmental Health vehicle. Switching to EVs upon lease renewal will reduce emissions by approximately 19tCO<sub>2</sub>e per year.

Whilst the Council cannot force staff to change their personal vehicle, it can incentivise and promote sustainable choices including active travel and public transport. Many local authorities have introduced pool vehicles and salary sacrifice schemes for EVs to reduce business mileage emissions.

Staff commuting habits have changed dramatically since the publication of the Environment Strategy (2020) due to the increase in remote working during the pandemic. Most staff work from Town hall when in the office. Town Hall is well located for public transport with the trainline providing links on the Hastings – Eastbourne line and to the north of the District via a change at St Leonards. Numerous bus services also operate from Bexhill. The 2023 staff commuting survey established 71% of respondents currently commute by private petrol or diesel vehicle. The measures mentioned to reduce business mileage will also reduce commuter mileage.

**Objective 2. The need to travel will be reduced, those that do will be on foot, bike, public transport, or in a low/zero carbon vehicle.**

Output 1. Sustainable forms of transport supported through the planning system

Output 2. Facilitate the transition to LZC vehicles across the District

Output 3. A programme of activities to promote active travel across the District

### Resource Consumption and Waste Reduction

#### The Challenge

Rother currently sends 0.11% of its waste to landfill with 22.95% composted, 26.18% recycled and 50.75% sent to the Newhaven Energy Recovery Facility. Whilst Rother has above average recycling and composting rates, these actions alone are not enough to support a low-carbon transition.

Disposal is only the final part of the process when it comes to resource consumption and waste. To reduce emissions, we must also consider the products we are using, where they come from, the resources required for manufacture, maintenance, use, and the energy used to distribute them.

Resources to be considered include, but are not limited to, water, food, fuel, and building materials. Emissions from services we consume such as leisure, sports, entertainment, and social activities are also to be considered.

The Committee on Climate Change (CCC) identified climate risks relating to food and water supply. The CCC also identified risks to international supply chains relating to food, clothing, and electronic equipment.

The impact of over-consumption is often not visible in the UK. Many of the products we buy are made overseas and imported. Not only does this result in high emission rates for those countries responsible for the manufacture, but it can also result in deforestation which exacerbates climate change. There is a general public awareness of the role palm oil plays in the deforestation of tropical rainforests, but beef, soy and wood products are also driving deforestation. By supporting locally produced materials and food systems, we can all play our part in ending deforestation.

We need to reduce the volume of resources we consume and transition to a circular economy.

#### Our Approach

##### Reducing District Emissions

In 2023, the Council introduced the Rother Reduce, Re-use, Recycle Grants which aims to encourage and fund the move towards a circular economy. Businesses, residents, and community groups can be encouraged to follow sustainable practices relating to resource consumption through a programme of corporate communications and engagement.

Local businesses will be encouraged to consider their own Scope 3 emissions and supported in reducing these wherever possible. A programme of decarbonising Rother's SME's will be funded through the UK Shared Prosperity Funding allocation.

The Environment Act requires local authorities and residents to make significant changes in relation to waste and reusing resources. Food waste collections will reduce food waste across the District and preparations are underway to introduce this in Rother in line with the Environmental Improvement Plan.

Through the Planning System, the Council will reduce construction waste and encourage the reuse of materials from buildings at the end of life. The new Local Plan will include policies relating to resource use including waste and water.

### Reducing Council Emissions

The introduction of an Environment Management System (EMS) will provide a framework for the Council to reduce its organisational resource consumption and waste. Through the reduction of operational emissions, sustainable procurement policies, supporting local food systems, and raising awareness through corporate communications, the Council can reduce resource-related emissions.

Objective 3. The District will produce less waste and support a thriving circular economy	
Output 1. Reduced consumption of resources and waste	Output 2. Increased repair, reuse and recycling of goods and materials

## Land Use and Biodiversity

### The Challenge

The UK is one of the most nature-depleted countries in the world having experienced major changes over the past few centuries and particularly the last 50 years according to the [2023 State of Nature Report](#). We know the role nature plays in tackling climate change as well as the broader benefits for people. We also know what is required to restore nature at scale.

As a predominately rural and coastal District, Rother has a heavily protected landscape. 82% falls within the High Weald AONB and a further 7 % is protected by national/international conservation designations. Ancient woodland covers >15% of the district, more than any District in the South East. Rother is also starting from a relatively high baseline in terms of carbon-sequestration due to the high levels of woodland. While there are opportunities for new woodland creation in urban areas, woodland creation within the AONB and designated areas would not be appropriate. Research carried out by ARUP on behalf of the Council for the new Local Plan evidence base suggests LULUCF will peak and remain stable at 2024 levels.

The Environment Act (2021) introduced a new locally driven approach to expand, improve, and connect places for wildlife across the country, a Nature Recovery Network. East Sussex County Council is responsible for developing the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) for the county with support from the Local Planning Authorities which includes Rother District Council. The formal process began in summer 2023 with the final strategy expected in 2025.

As a local planning authority Rother District Council has a statutory ‘Biodiversity Duty’ which was introduced by the Environment Act, 2021. This means the Council must consider what it can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity, agree policies and specific objectives based on the Council’s consideration, and act to deliver the policies and achieve the Council's objectives.

## Our Approach

### Nature Recovery and Carbon Sequestration for the District

Land with high sequestration potential across the District will be protected and enhanced wherever possible. This will be done through corporate communications and engagement, grant-giving opportunities and the planning system.

The new Local Plan will include policies which prioritise land use changes which favour GHG removals like new woodland and the sustainable management of woodlands, wetlands and arable lands.

The development of the LNRS for Sussex will be supported by the Council and decision-making relating to the LNRS will be strengthened in the Local Plan. If deemed feasible by the Planning Inspectorate, the Council will require 20% Biodiversity Net Gain, going beyond the 10% the legal requirement.

The Council will continue to work in partnership with local conservation organisations, government bodies and the wider community to fund and deliver projects across the District, including land management practices and water health.

### Nature Recovery and carbon sequestration on RDC Assets

The Council will assess RDC-owned green and blue assets and implement a programme to enhance these sites for nature recovery and carbon sequestration. This will include the designation of specific areas for wilding, natural flood management, and tree and hedge planting where appropriate.

Management conditions will be added to new leases of Council-owned land to ensure tenants are actively enhancing the sites for nature.

### Objective 4. Nature will be in recovery across the District

Output 1. Halt land and marine species decline

Output 2. Increase biodiversity and carbon sequestration

## Energy Generation

### The Challenge

The UK Government has set a target for the electricity system to be fully decarbonised by 2035. At the same time, it is expected electricity demand in the UK will at least double by 2050 compared to usage at 2018 levels. Whilst grid decarbonisation is not currently in line with the Council's 2030 target, it is now occurring rapidly due to the increase in renewable generation. To meet the future demand for electricity, renewable energy will need to be increased at pace.

Locally produced renewable energy and storage can support energy security and reduce exposure to volatile, international fossil fuel price fluctuations. There is the potential for the Council to generate income through renewable energy. The scale of installation will be dependent on grid capacity and network upgrades. UK Power Networks (UKPN) are the



main Distribution Network Operator (DNO) for Rother and the South East, responsible for maintaining and upgrading the electricity network.

The East Sussex Pension Fund, which Rother District Council contributes towards, currently invests in fossil fuels. In 2022 the Council passed a motion to call on the East Sussex Pension Fund to immediately halt new investment in fossil fuels and withdraw its existing investments within the next five years.

The Council will encourage local generation of renewable electricity to support future demand.

### Our Approach

#### Renewable Energy Across the District

Rother can further support grid decarbonisation by participating in smart energy solutions, shifting, and reducing peak demand and storing excess production.

The Council will encourage domestic renewable energy generation throughout Rother through collective buying schemes such as Solar Together. Decarbonisation support and grant funding will also be provided to businesses.

The Emerging Local Plan will include policies which positively plan for renewable energy and District heat networks. There will also be policies to support community energy.

UKPN are continuing to grow the support they offer local authorities. The Council will work closely with UKPN to ensure the needs of Rother residents and businesses are met.

#### Renewable Energy on RDC Assets

The Council switched to a green energy provider in 2021 and has installed solar PV where economically viable on operational buildings as well as several commercially leased properties. The Council will continue to install renewable energy systems where viable on existing and future assets, including leased commercial and residential properties.

Council-owned open spaces such as car parks and agricultural land will be explored for solar potential alongside alternative investment opportunities for renewable energy generation and storage.

#### Objective 5. Clean, renewable energy will be produced locally

Output 1. Solar PV on all suitable roof space

Output 2. Support renewable energy generation

## Appendices

District-wide 2021 emissions report

RDC 22/23 Organisational Emissions Report

ARUP 2023 Report for the New Local Plan